



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

2 PLEAD GUILTY TO HUMAN SMUGGLING USING RENTED SAILING YACHT

LOS ANGELES — Two men entered guilty pleas in federal court here today for their role in a widely publicized human smuggling scheme involving a French-built luxury sailing yacht.

Gregory Ray LaBono, 48, and Vernon Eugene Siegel Jr., 22, each pleaded guilty to one felony count of conspiracy to encourage and induce an alien to enter the United States.

The two men are scheduled to be sentenced January 10, 2005 and face a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison.

The pair was arrested in September by officers from the U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) as they attempted to smuggle 50 Mexican nationals into the United States by way of Los Angeles Harbor aboard a 44-foot sailboat.

The interdiction of the rented yacht marked the largest incidence of maritime human smuggling uncovered in the Los Angeles area in recent years. The migrants, including a 3-year-old boy and a woman in her final month of pregnancy, were crowded into the vessel's small cabin, which was designed to sleep eight people.

"Human smuggling is a brutal trade, and anyone who aids a smuggler is contributing to this public safety threat," said Loraine Brown, special agent-in-charge for ICE investigations in Los Angeles. "We're not only aggressively pursuing the criminal organizations behind this activity, but also those who support them."

The two men admitted they picked up the migrants in the Mexican port city of Ensenada for the day long trip to Los Angeles. The migrants told ICE agents they paid \$3,000 each in smuggling fees.

ICE investigators say the incident shows smugglers' growing desperation in the wake of heightened immigration enforcement along our nation's southern border and at key Arizona and Los Angeles transportation hubs.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.